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Publication Info

Published in *Legacy*, Volume 10, Issue 3, 2006, pages 8-9.

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Research

Coastal Shell Midden Research

By Chester DePratter

Two years ago, I decided to initiate a long-term research project involving coastal shell middens. This work was intended as a continuation and extension of work that I had done in Georgia coastal marshes before I moved to South Carolina in 1984. In the past two years I have worked in several areas of the coast on a variety of different projects.

The first major coastal work took place in winter, 2004 [*Legacy* 9 (1/2): 18]. That survey produced information on a cluster of 16 clam shell middens in the small marsh between Litchfield Beach and the mainland in Georgetown County. Those sites have now been mapped and tested, and I am working on obtaining basal radiocarbon dates for as many of the middens as I can. So

far I have obtained seven radiocarbon dates ranging between roughly A.D. 500 and A.D. 1,000. Four more samples have been submitted.

As a part of this clamshell midden study, I have been traveling to the Litchfield marsh to collect samples of live clams monthly for the past two years. The growth patterns of these clams are being studied by Dr. Douglas Jones and Irvy Quitmyer of the Florida Museum of Natural History [*Legacy* 9 (3):12-13]. This work will ultimately allow estimates for the season(s) of the year during which each of the middens was occupied. Preliminary results indicate that the samples analyzed to date suggest that the middens were occupied seasonally in the late

spring. Doug Jones, Irvy Quitmyer, and I presented a paper on this work in November 2006 at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas.

I am also working on a survey of the extensive marshes located to the east of St. Helena Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina. This project, done in conjunction with local resident Gibbes McDowell, is intended to provide information on the development of these marshes over the past 4,000 to 5,000 years. This involves new survey, collection of data from previous archaeological work, and collaboration with a geologist who has interests similar to mine. This geologist, Dr. Frank Stapor of Tennessee Tech University, and I made a trip to the coast in October to collect soil samples for Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating. These samples are currently being processed. Taken in conjunction with dates derived from

prehistoric pottery collections and radiocarbon samples, these OSL dates should help in determining the depositional dates for the hammocks and beach ridges located in the marshes.

Early in October 2006, I visited the Spanish Mount Shell Mound on Edisto Island. What was once a huge shell midden has been reduced to a small remnant by erosion in the past several decades. Working through David Jones, SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism archaeologist,



Dr. Frank Stapor kneeling beside OSL sampling station, Old Island, Beaufort County. (SCIAA photo by Chester DePratter)



Michael Stoner mapping the Joe Mix site, Beaufort County. (SCIAA photo by Chester DePratter)

I obtained permission to do some work on this important site. In November, Jim Legg, Stan South, and I mapped the site and recorded a detailed profile of the exposed shoreline face of the midden. We took numerous carbon samples from the exposed profile with the intention of getting a series of dates on the various occupational zones mapped within this Thoms Creek period (c. 2,000-1,000 B.C.) midden. I recently obtained funds through the Archaeological Research Trust (ART)

that will allow me to submit 10 of these samples for dating. The resulting 10 dates will allow tracking of the rate of accumulation of this midden as well as provide increased accuracy in the dating of this and other Thoms Creek period occupations. This work will have application in the St. Helena marshes and elsewhere along the coast where Thoms Creek and contemporary sites with Stallings fiber-tempered pottery and located in close proximity to one another.

I will continue this marsh-related research as funds become available. Work to be conducted in the near future includes mapping, testing, and dating more clamshell middens in Georgetown County, and additional survey in the St. Helena marshes in Beaufort County. Frank Stapor and I will also be taking another series of OSL samples in January 2007, in an effort to further refine our understanding of shoreline development and sea level change along the coast.

Stan South Keynote at Joffre Lanning Coe Lecture Series

On October 2006, Stan South was the keynote speaker in Raleigh, North Carolina, for the newly created Joffre Lanning Coe Lecture Series. The series is sponsored by The Coe Foundation for Archaeological Research, Inc., in collaboration with the North Carolina Museum of History, the Division of State Historic Sites and Properties, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science. Stan's talk "Treasures from the Past: The Early Historical Archaeology of North Carolina," was accompanied by slides of archaeology he carried out on 17 of North Carolina's historic sites between 1955 and

1969. The talk was well received by more than 300 persons interested in historical archaeology.

The Coe Foundation has also established "The Stanley A. South Award for Excellence in Historical Archaeology," and he was presented with the first award. In addition, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley presented Stan with that state's highest civilian award, "The Old North State Award," for dedication and service beyond expectation and excellence to the Great State of North Carolina, on behalf of the citizens of this State.

